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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BOGOTA 001169

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SUBJECT: SIX COLOMBIAN CONGRESSMEN--INCLUDING FM ARAUJO'S
BROTHER--ARRESTED IN PARAMILITARY-POLITICAL SCANDAL

REF: 2006 BOGOTA 10976

Classified By: Charge d'Affairs Milton K. Drucker - Reasons 1.4 (b)(d)

11. (C) Summary. On February 15, six additional Congressmen--including FM Araujo's brother, Senator Alvaro Araujo--were ordered jailed by the Supreme Court for alleged ties to paramilitary groups and other crimes. Senator Araujo is also accused of aggravated kidnapping. A total of nine members of Congress are charged with crimes related to paramilitary ties, and additional investigations are underway. Government and opposition leaders expressed strong public support for the Supreme Court and the process to bring politicians with paramilitary links to justice. On February 16, President Uribe said FM Araujo has his full support and will stay in her job. Both coalition and opposition party leaders told us the decision to allow the FM to stay was a mistake. End summary.

Nine Congressmen Charged with Para Links

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12. (U) On February 15, the Colombian Supreme Court ordered the arrest and detention of six Congressmen for alleged ties to paramilitary groups and other crimes. Senator Alvaro Araujo (Foreign Minister Maria Consuelo Araujo's brother and head of the Alas Equipo Party), Senator Dieb Maloof (Colombia Viva), Senator Mauricio Pimiento (U Party), Senator Luis Eduardo Vives (Convergencia Ciudadana), and Representative Alfonso Campo Escobar (Conservative) were detained on the 15th and are to be held in La Picota prison in Bogota. Representative Jorge Luis Caballero (Apertura Liberal) was ordered detained, but is still at large. A total of nine Congressmen, all from the government's congressional coalition, face charges of aggravated conspiracy to commit criminal activity based on their alleged ties to paramilitary groups (reftel). Senator Araujo is also charged with conspiracy to commit kidnapping and extortion for allegedly organizing the kidnapping of a political rival.

13. (U) Along with the detention of the six Congressmen, the Court also called Cesar Governor Hernando Molina Araujo in for questioning about alleged links to paramilitary groups and illegal campaign financing. Molina is Senator Araujo's and FM Araujo's cousin, as well as Inspector General Edgardo Maya's stepson. The Court is also investigating Alvaro Araujo Noguera--the FM's and Senator Araujo's father.

Other Politicians and Officials Under Investigation

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14. (U) In mid-November, the Prosecutor General's Office opened investigations into former officials and businessmen,

including former Administrative Department of Security (DAS - FBI equivalent) Director Jorge Noguera and former Sucre governor and Colombian ambassador to Chile Salvador Arana. In December, the Court called four other senators, two representatives, and the Governor of Magdalena to testify on the scandal--some are likely to be implicated. In mid-January, the Court began investigations of 30 political figures, businessmen, and one journalist linked to paramilitaries.

Support for Institutions and Process Strong

15. (C) Minister of Government and Justice Carlos Holguin, coalition members of Congress, and opposition party leaders publicly stated their support for the Supreme Court and its efforts to bring politicians with para ties to justice. Liberal Party heavyweight Rafael Pardo told us the arrests could spur support for major electoral reform, including measures to protect the integrity of the ballot box and to provide for bye or midterm elections. He pointed out that more than 30 Congressmen were jailed in the "Caso 8,000" scandals in the 1990s involving narcotraffickers' financing of a presidential campaign. Colombia's institutions could withstand the current crisis. Liberal Party Spokesman and Representative Guillermo Rivera introduced a limited electoral reform proposal on February 8th which would provide for public campaign financing. Rivera told us Araujo's arrest shows the Court is not under pressure to protect government allies or the country's political elite.

Foreign Minister Says she will Stay

16. (C) President Uribe announced on February 16 that the FM
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Araujo will stay in her job, saying, "I will not sacrifice a countrywomen who has done well." Holguin also publicly expressed support for the FM, noting that criminal guilt is an individual responsibility. Senior coalition members--including U Party President Carlos Garcia and Senator Martha Lucia Ramirez--expressed surprise over the FM's quick announcement to stay, and told us the decision was a political mistake by the both the FM and president--even though there are no charges directly against the FM. Our contacts tell us that the FM may be summoned to appear again before Congress as early as the weeks of February 19 or 26, to defend her position in what opposition Senator Cecilia Lopez said will be an "intense" debate. The FM last testified in Congress about the allegations against her brother on November 29.
DRUCKER